DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 172 283 CS 502 539

AUTHOR Stewart, Lea P.
TITLE Grammar: An Exploratory Study of Students' Attitudes toward the Shibboleth.
PUB DATE May 79
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 1-5, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Grammar; Higher Education; *Language Attitudes; Language Research; Language Role; *Language Usage; Public Speaking; *Speech Communication; Speech Evaluation; *Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Forty undergraduate students were subjects in a study to discover students' attitudes toward language and grammar and to determine how the demand for grammatical correctness affected them in preparing and delivering public speeches. The subjects each completed an 11-item interview schedule that elicited demographic information as well as feelings and opinions about grammar and public speaking. The results showed the following: students believed in the existence of a "correct grammar"; most students had been exposed to grammar drill in secondary school; most believed that good grammar was a mark of an educated person; most felt that constant monitoring of one's language leads to self-consciousness; many felt that good grammar would not necessarily increase someone's opinion of them but that bad grammar would definitely detract from someone's opinion of them, especially in job interviews; and a number of the students felt that teachers were purposely looking for mistakes in student work. (A copy of the interview schedule is appended.) (PL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED172283

GRAMMAR: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE SHIBBOLETH

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Lea P. Stewart

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

by

Lea P. Stewart
Department of Communication
Purdue University

Division VII

Competitively Selected Papers on Communication Development
International Communication Association Convention
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 1-5, 1979

The author wishes to express her appreciation to Dr. Ralph Webb, Jr. for his support and guidance during the course of this research.

CS502539

ABSTRACT

This paper combines the study of speech and language, as called for by Higginbotham (1974). Specifically, it attempts to discern the attitudes toward "grammar" of students enrolled in a basic speech course. The structural linguists' notion of grammar is compared to the students' notions in order to pinpoint potential instructional problems. Forty undergraduate students were interviewed extensively and their attitudes toward grammar were explored. The effects of the demand for grammatical correctness on students preparing and delivering speeches was also noted. These perceptions were then compared with linguistic principles. Results of this comparison suggest that the addition of a unit on language (stressing the linguists' approach to grammar) to the traditional basic course in speech communication is needed.

INTRODUCTION

In the Report of the Memphis Conference of Teacher Educators (Newcombe and Allen, 1974), one of the conference participants, Dorothy Higginbotham, notes that "speech and language have been and to a considerable extent continue to be studied as distinct disciplines" (p. 12). In the past, many researchers in the field of linguistics have concentrated on language with little regard for its use in actual communication situations, while researchers in the field of speech communication have studied the communication process with little attention to language. Higginbotham maintains that "the inevitable consequence of this decision is that the interdependence of speech and language has been obscured with the result that in theory building, research, and teaching, the full implications of each for the other has only recently begun to be explored" (p. 12).

Certainly, language is part of every speaking situation and, therefore, should be a vital area of concern and study for anyone interested in speech communication. There have been very few studies, however, in the speech communication field which have investigated language systematically or directly. Although some studies have investigated the relationship between the communication process and language (e.g., Porter, Freimuth and Kibler, 1974; Redd, 1970), most have not viewed language as a variable of central importance.

The traditional area of concern and study for all linguists has been the describing and analyzing of language patterns. There are two major models for linguistic investigation: the Bloomfieldian or structuralist model and the generative-transformational model first advocated by Noam Chomsky. Early structural linguists, such as Bloomfield, gathered large amounts of language data and attempted to describe the grammar of a language, that is, the descriptive rules which account for the way that language actually is used by native speakers. Later linguists who followed Chomsky not only attempted to describe and analyze language, but also to account for a native speaker's ability to formulate language patterns.

The generative-transformational model, which is currently popular among many linguists, however, is not readily applicable to speech communication research. Contemporary linguists are in the process of constructing models to account for an individual's ability to formulate sentences. These models are not, however, designed to deal with the actual communication event. While the structuralist model is not designed to account for a native speaker's ability to formulate sentences, since it is a model of language patterns based on actual usage it is a more appropriate model for studying language in the speech communication setting.

The present study is an investigation of language and speech, as Higginbotham (1974) suggests. It applies the results of structuralist linguistic investigations to the study of speech communication. Specifically, it attempts to discern the attitudes toward "grammar" of students enrolled in a basic speech course. It compares the structural linguists' notion of grammar with students' beliefs in order to pinpoint potential instructional problems.

Background: The American Idea of Correctness

Linguistic principles. Linguists attempt to discover the grammatical rules followed by speakers of a language. Southworth and Daswani (1974) note that:

> When we say that people who share the same language share a set of rules, we mean that linguistic behavior is organized and has a structure which follows rules. The job of the linguist is to study the linguistic structure of a language and to attempt to formulate these rules. (p. 103)

In formulating these rules, linguists apply the scientific method of observation and conclusion to create a descriptive grammar of a language; that is, usage (what the speakers of a language actually say) governs what is judged grammatical. Descriptive grammar is primarily concerned with definitions or statements of grammatical "facts," which can be empirically tested (Allen, 1972). The linguists' descriptive approach to grammar is in direct opposition to traditional prescriptive notions of grammar which, by contrast, assume that there is a correctness in the English language that is absolute. This view of language calls attention to certain forms that speakers are to avoid and labels certain forms or expressions as "wrong" or "bad" English. The majority of American laymen today take the point of view of prescriptive grammar (Pyles, 1971).

This traditional prescriptive notion ignores the fact that there are acceptable variants in language, that is, speech forms which do not differ in social acceptability and are commonly used by speakers of standard English. For example, the distinction between shall and will is not closely observed in general usage. In addition, the prescriptive notion does not take into account regional and social dialects. Linguists have identified clear phonemic, etymological, and phonetic differences in the speech of speakers from different areas of the United States (Southworth and Daswani, 1974). In contrast to this regional variation, speakers within a single region may exhibit social dialects or consistant "linguistic differences which correlate with the speaker's socio-economic class or stratum in the society" (Southworth and Daswani, 1974, p. 241). While linguists objectively describe these differences in usage, many laymen believe that speakers of various regional and especially social dialects are speaking "incorrectly."

Description. Bailey (1973) claims that since America has no aristocratic or metropolitan reference group using a "proper" form of speech (unlike countries such as France), Americans have imagined one into existence for the sake of "correctness."

Several research studies support the conclusion that Americans believe in an absolute standard of correctness. Rosenthal (1973) notes that many preschool children have a remarkably consistent notion of what is "correct" and "not correct" in language. Shuy (1973) maintains that as students start junior high school (if not earlier) they are barraged with statements about the importance of learning standard English if they are ever to make something of their lives.

To sample adults' notions about language also, Shuy (1973) asked 16 Washington, D.C. employers to evaluate 16 samples of speech. The reactions of the employers were that: (1) there is one best form of English which should be spoken at all times; (2) a person's language use reflects his logic and intelligence; (3) nonstandard speech should be eradicated; and (4) making mistakes is always bad.

Many Americans believe that "ordinary speech" is basically careless and that people should be more careful in their use of language. For example, most speakers admitted that they "should" use expressions such as "The slot in which it goes" instead of "The slot it goes in," yet they did not do so in actual practice (Wolfram and Fasold, 1974). Pyles (1971) also notes that most people seem to think they should observe "the rules of grammar" more conscientiously than they do. According to Bailey (1973), most Americans believe that "good English . . . [is] an ideal towards which all strive but . . . no one attains" (p. 386). In 1960, Hall described an American attitude which still persists today:

> Usually we are told and we believe that "correctness" is characteristic of educated, intelligent people, whereas "incorrectness" is the special quality of uneducated, ignorant, or stupid people. (p. 11)

Aly (1956) claims that teachers "continue to believe that 'correctness' is somehow built into words, [and] is in fact determined by laws of language" (p. 167). According to Gleason (1965), the idea that English grammar is the art of speaking and writing English correctly has been one of the main forces molding popular attitudes about grammar. Recently, Langacker (1973) continued to support the conclusions of Aly and Gleason by adding that the idea that there are "correct" and "incorrect" varieties of a language is fostered to a considerable degree by educators.

The attempt to define "good usage": Survey of research in English. As already noted, there is general agreement among lay speakers of English that good English should be acquired and that "the rules" should be followed; however, "we do not by any means agree as to what . . . good English is" (Fries, 1966, p. 2).

In a research study supporting this conclusion, Malmstrom (1959) compared information from the Linguistic Atlas of the United States (a massive survey of the actual usage of the American people) with 312 usage books from all school levels (grades 3 through 12). Malstrom concludes that:

> the textbook writers as a group do not succeed in defining any consistent standard of "correctness" . . . [therefore] their basic premise that such a standard exists comes into question. If it [correctness] is an undefinable abstraction, it is of little practical value in teaching. Indeed, as we have seen, it can all too easily lead to contradictions and confusions. (p. 197)

Thus, there appears to be little agreement, even among writers of usage books, as to the nature of the "correct" grammatical standard. Nevertheless, there still exists the general misconception among American laymen that, in order to be correct, language must be spoken strictly according to rules presented in our grammar handbooks and textbooks and even textbook writers believe in an arbitrary standard of "correctness" that can and should be discovered and taught.

Survey of current research. Only two current empirical studies in the field of communication deal with the laymen's idea of "grammatical errors" and communication.

Sencer (1965), in an unpublished study, had 300 male college freshmen read 1200-word essays containing varying numbers of "grammatical errors," from no errors to approximately 51 errors in 500 words. From results of "cloze" procedure comprehension tests which the students filled out after reading the essays, Sencer concluded that comprehension was not affected by grammatical errors.

In another unpublished study, Redd (1970) found that severity of grammatical errors in a speech affected students' perception of "intelligence of the speaker" and "language effectiveness" but not their perceptions of the speaker's "vocal quality," "delivery," or "credibility."

Although dealing with "grammatical errors," Sencer's study is not applicable to the present study because it deals with written communication. Redd, however, specifically deals with the public speaking situation. In her study, Redd did not make a clear distinction between "grammatical errors" which occur when a speaker chooses a form of an expression which is not regularly used by socially acceptable speakers and "grammatical errors" which occur when a speaker uses one form of an expression which has two commonly used forms. For example, as Hall (1960) points out, "the difference in social acceptability between I ain't and I am not, between hern and hers, and so forth, is a real fact" (p. 13). These two instances reflect what linguists label ungrammatical, that is, they violate the rules of generally accepted usage. In many instances of language usage, however, there is not such a clear cut social difference. Some speech forms (for example, using it's me instead of it is I) normally do not differ in social acceptability. Nonetheless, American speakers tend to feel that one of these forms must be "correct," while the other form must be "incorrect" even though they have heard these variants from approximately the same kinds of speaker (Bloomfield, 1933; Fries, 1966).

This fact leads to the following research questions:

Since language and grammar are salient aspects of the public speaking situation, (1) What are students' attitudes toward language and grammar? and (2) How does the demand for grammatical correctness affect students when they are preparing and delivering public speeches?

METHODOLOGY

The subjects of this study were 40 undergraduate students enrolled in the basic speech communication course at Purdue University during the Spring 1976 semester. The subjects were participants in the author's masters' thesis research.

Since previous researchers have not studied students' attitudes toward grammar or the effects of these attitudes on the public speaking situation, standardized instruments to measure these attitudes do not exist. To measure these attitudes, therefore, a researcher would need to construct a standardized measure (such as a self-report scale) or rely on a less structured format such as an interview. The present researcher chose the interview format due to its potential for yielding more information even if that information is not as quantifiable as the information received from the use of a standardized instrument.

Thus, an 11-question Interview Schedule was devised by the researcher for use in this study. The Interview Schedule was designed to elicit demographic information as well as feelings and opinions about grammar and public speaking from the respondents. A moderately-scheduled interview format was followed. A copy of the schedule is included in Appendix A.

Each of the 40 respondents was contacted and a one-hour interview period was scheduled. The interviews were conducted by the researcher in the same room during a ten-day time period. Each interview was tape recorded with the consent of the respondent. Due to a mechanical failure of the tape recorder, three respondents had to be re-interviewed.

In order to establish rapport and make the respondents feel comfortable in the interview setting, they were first asked to provide some demographic information (see question 1 of the Interview Schedule, reproduced in Appendix A) and to provide some information on their speech background (see question 2). The respondents were then asked to rank seven items (delivery, organization, grammar, supporting material, visual aids, reasoning, and choice of subject) in order of importance to them when making a public speech (see question 3). The respondents were then asked questions 4 through 11 and follow-up questions, such as "Why?" or "Why not?", to elicit additional information. The interview was terminated by thanking the respondents for their participation in the study and asking them not to discuss the interview with their classmates.

RESULTS

The following results were obtained from an analysis of the responses to the questions on the Interview Schedule.

Question 1: Are you a freshman, sophomore, junior or senior? What school are you in? How old are you? Where were you born?

The overwhelming majority of respondents (n = 35) were college freshmen. Their mean age was 18.8 years. Their major areas of study were fairly evenly divided among the programs offered at Purdue University. A large number of the respondents (n = 23) were born in and were residents of the state of Indiana.

Question 2: Have you given a speech in your basic communication class yet? How many speeches have you given? What type (or types) of speeches were they? When were they given? Have you ever given a speech outside of the basic class? Please describe the occasion and the type of speech.

All respondents had given an informative speech in the basic speech course prior to the interviews. Since the interviews for the present study were conducted at the time when persuasive speeches were being given, some of the respondents had given a second in-class speech. Eleven of the respondents reported that they had never given a speech outside of their basic speech class.

Question 3: Rank the following items in order of importance to you when you are delivering a public speech--delivery, organization, grammar, supporting material, visual aids, reasoning, choice of subject.

The mode ranking for each item is listed in Table 1. Respondents considered "choice of subject" to be the most important and "visual aids" to be the least important item when delivering a public speech. Most of the respondents reported that most of the other listed items were of more importance to them than "grammar" when delivering a public speech.

Table 1

Question 4: Is grammar something that you feel you are concerned with? Why?

Responses to this question were categorized as follows:

Grammar "comes naturally," it is not much of a problem because the respondent was brought up to know what to say. (21 responses)
It is more important to get one's ideas across. (10 responses)
Grammar shows a person's intelligence, poor grammar takes away a great deal from what one has to say. (8 responses)
The respondent notices a great deal of "bad grammar" today. (1 response)

Thus, most of the respondents indicated that "grammar" comes fairly naturally to them and is, therefore, of little concern.

Question 5: Would you or do you pay more attention to your use of grammar when you are giving a speech than at other times? Why?

Responses were categorized as follows:

The respondent feels too nervous in front of people; he/she needs to pay attention to other things. (10 responses)
Good grammar increases one's credibility, helps one to come across well so that one will not distract the audience. (9 responses)
It does not bother the respondent in oral communication. (8 responses)
Using poor grammar affects a teacher's evaluation of the speech. (4 responses)
The respondent is more concerned about getting his/her ideas across. (3 responses)
No reason given. (1 response)

Some respondents felt too nervous in front of an audience to pay attention to grammar, while others paid particular attention to grammar in order to increase their credibility.

Question 6: Can you remember a specific teacher, or maybe even several teachers, who impressed upon you the importance of using good grammar?

Six respondents could not recall a specific teacher. For those respondents who named a specific teacher or teachers, responses were coded into the following categories:

High school teacher (15 responses)
Junior high school teacher (10 responses)
Elementary school teacher (5 responses)
College teacher (4 responses)

Thus, more respondents remembered high school teachers who corrected their grammar.

Question 6, part 2: What do you remember most about this teacher?

Responses to this question were categorized as follows:

The teacher stressed grammar over ideas and "drilled it into the students." (18 responses)
The teacher always spoke correctly. (6 responses)
The teacher's criticisms helped students realize good grammar was important. (5 responses)
The teacher claimed that good grammar showed a person's intelligence. (3 responses)
The teacher should have stressed grammar more. (1 response)
The teacher taught "common sense." (1 response)

Thus, the majority of the respondents seemed to have a negative impression of teachers who impressed upon them the importance of "good grammar." The respondents remembered that grammar was stressed over ideas and that it was "drilled into you." Very few students (n = 5) thought that the teacher was being helpful.

Question 6, part 3: Did this teacher make you feel at all self-conscious about speaking? Why?

Responses to this question were categorized as follows:

The respondent felt confident about the use of grammar. (8 responses)
The teacher was being helpful. (3 responses)
The respondent mentioned the authority of the teacher. (3 responses)
The course emphasized writing not speaking. (2 responses)
The respondent knew the whole class was watching if a grammatical mistake was made. (2 responses)
The respondent claimed grammar did not matter. (1 response)

Thus, many of these respondents did not feel self-conscious about their use of grammar.

Question 7: Can you remember an instance when you made a grammatical mistake and someone jumped on you for it?

About half the respondents (n = 19) could remember being corrected for making a grammatical mistake.

Question 7, part 2: Can you remember what you said?

The responses of respondents who remembered a specific grammatical mistake were categorized into:

Actual errors (verb tense, ain't, double negatives). (17 responses)
Perceived errors which are not considered grammatical errors (slip of the tongue, mispronunciation, word choice). (11 responses)
Prescriptive errors. (5 responses)
Errors in written language. (8 responses)

Respondents recalled as many perceived errors as actual errors.

Question 7, part 3: How did you feel [when someone corrected you for making a grammatical error]? Why?

Responses to this question were categorized as follows:

The respondent does not like to make mistakes or have someone correct them. (7 responses)
The respondent was glad, because the person was being helpful. (5 responses)
The person was emphasizing the mistakes instead of the ideas presented. (5 responses)
The person was teasing. (1 response)
Grammar is not that important. (1 response)

Some respondents were upset by being corrected for grammatical errors.

Question 8: Do teachers criticize your grammar a lot? Why?

Responses to this question were categorized as follows:

Because I don't make that many mistakes. (12 responses)
They have no time; they're concentrating on the subject of the course, grammar is not a part of the class. (10 responses)
No reason given. (6 responses)
Only on papers. (5 responses)
To help you. (2 responses)
So a person will not withdraw. (2 responses)
The respondent does not say that much in class. (1 response)
The respondent's vocabulary is not very large. (1 response)
Only if you "overdo" it. (1 response)

Again, many respondents felt they were not criticized because they generally spoke "correctly."

Question 8, part 2: Do speech teachers criticize your grammar as much as other teachers? Why?

Responses to this question were categorized as follows:

That's their job, speech teachers are trained to pick out grammatical errors so you can learn to speak in front of people. (18 responses)
Speech teachers feel that if that is your way of communicating it is all right, grammar is not the most important thing in a speech. (6 responses)
The respondent feels he/she speaks well (5 responses)
Not in the respondent's experience. (5 responses)
Using correct grammar would help when looking for a job, it gives confidence in front of people. (4 responses)
It is now too late to point out mistakes. (2 responses)

Thus, many respondents believed that it is the speech teacher's job to correct grammatical errors.

Question 8, part 3: Do other people ever criticize your grammar? For example, your friends? Why?

Responses to this question were categorized as follows:

Friends are not worried about your grammar as long as the meaning gets across. (10 responses)
The respondent talks the same as his/her friends and makes the same mistakes. (10 responses)
As a joke. (7 responses)
The respondent corrects friends' grammar. (5 responses)
To improve the respondent's speech, to help him/her out. (4 responses)
Friends do not want to hurt your feelings. (2 responses)
Because the respondent talks differently than his/her friends. (2 responses)

In general, then, respondents believed that their friends were not particularly concerned about their grammar.

Question 8, part 4: Do other people ever criticize your grammar? For example, your parents? Why?

Responses to this question were categorized as follows:

His/her parents used to criticize grammar, but do not anymore. (7 responses)
To help the respondent out, so he/she will impress people. (6 responses)
The family does not talk about matters such as grammar. (4 responses)
The respondent feels he/she does not make that many errors. (3 responses)
The respondent speaks the same way as the parents do. (3 responses)
As a joke, kidding. (2 responses)
The respondent is not around his/her parents that much. (2 responses)
Only the respondent's mother does. (2 responses)
No reason given. (2 responses)

Thus, several of the respondents mentioned that their parents used to criticize their grammar but that they no longer did. Others noted that their parents criticized their grammar "to help out" so that they would be able to "impress people" with their use of good grammar.

Question 8, part 5: Do other people ever criticize your grammar? For example, anyone besides your parents or friends? Why?

Few respondents (n = 10) named a specific person other than friends or parents who ever criticized their grammar.

Question 9: Can you remember any books that specifically told you to avoid grammatical mistakes?

Responses to this question were categorized as follows:

English books (15 responses)
Grammar books (5 responses)
Novels (4 responses)
Miscellaneous books (3 responses)
College books (1 response)

Thus, more respondents mentioned English books than any other type of book.

Question 9, part 2: What do you remember about these books?

Responses to this question were categorized as follows:

Emphasized rules. (11 responses)
"Boring," "dry," "uninteresting." (10 responses)
Set an example, either good or bad. (7 responses)
Helpful, handy as a reference. (2 responses)

Thus, most of the respondents remembered that the books emphasized rules or were not very interesting reading.

Question 10: Do you think you pay as much attention to your grammar when you prepare to give a speech as you do when you prepare to write a paper? Why?

Responses to this question were categorized as follows:

The speech outline is brief, a paper can be read and re-read by the teacher to notice grammatical mistakes. (21 responses)
The respondent writes out both a speech and a paper. (7 responses)
A discussion tone is used in a speech, a paper needs to be more formal and takes more time to write. (4 responses)
The respondent can re-read a paper and correct grammatical mistakes before it is handed in, a speech is given only once. (3 responses)
More people hear a speech. (3 responses)
The respondent does not worry about either. (2 responses)

Thus, the respondents seem concerned about grammatical errors in situations where teachers have more time to notice them.

Question 11: Generally, are you concerned about your use of grammar? Why?

Responses to this question were categorized as follows:

The respondent believes good grammar shows intelligence, education. (11 responses)
The respondent is confident of his ability. (10 responses)
The respondent is more concerned about ideas, one cannot change one's use of grammar now. (7 responses)
The respondent is concerned in front of people, for example, giving a speech, but not with friends. (6 responses)
The respondent is concerned with grammar only when writing a paper. (2 responses)
People keep talking about the importance of good grammar. (2 responses)
Thinking about grammar seems to improve it. (1 response)
America is losing its language. (1 response)

Thus, many of the respondents are confident of their ability to use good grammar.

DISCUSSION

Seven major conclusions can be drawn from this study. First of all, students enrolled in a basic speech course believed in the existence of a "correct grammar." Some students believed that they used "correct grammar" while others believed that they did not use it. The majority of the

respondents in this study viewed "grammar" from Fries' (1940) "conventional point of view," that there is one correct way to speak. One respondent mentioned that he liked to study grammar "because it was something that had rules and you could stick to them." Several respondents felt that they had "talked better" in junior high or high school, when they were taking "grammar" courses, than they do now. One respondent said, "I had forgotten most of my grammar, actually, I still . . . use proper grammar, but I have forgotten most of it from when I was in junior high school." Thus, these respondents considered "grammar" a set of artificial rules to be memorized and not the structuring principle of their language. This idea is consistent with linguists' description of the common attitude toward grammar (cf. Bloomfield, 1933; Hall, 1960; Fries, 1966; Pyles, 1971).

Secondly, most of the respondents had been exposed to a junior high or high school teacher who they perceived "drilled" grammar into them, corresponding to Shuy's (1973) and Langacker's (1973) observations that most students are "drilled" in prescriptive grammar. They remembered the teacher emphasizing rules and constantly interrupting them to correct mistakes. One respondent described her frustration when she asked a teacher, "Can I have this?", and the teacher said "What?" over and over until the girl said "May I have this?"; at that point, the teacher asked the girl what she wanted and the girl realized that the teacher had been listening to how she was speaking instead of to what she was saying. Many respondents mentioned that they did not like to have their grammar corrected because it indicated to them that the person they were talking to was paying more attention to how they were speaking than to what they were trying to say.

Third, most of the respondents believed that good grammar was a mark of an educated person. Typical comments were: "If they use bad grammar, you think either they don't care or they're lazy;" "You don't pay much attention to people who sound stupid;" and "When you have good grammar it seems like you sound more intelligent." Many of the respondents agreed that "you should think about it [grammar] because people are going to judge you by how you talk, what kind of language you use."

Several students, however, expressed the belief that "certain situations take different modes of grammar," as Scheidel (1972) indicates. Most of the students differentiated between the type of grammar used in a formal speech and the type of grammar used in front of a class. When asked to explain the difference, several students mentioned that they would use a "more discussional" tone in front of their classes and would perhaps use a few slang expressions. The students also claimed that grammatical mistakes in a speech drew "their [the audience's] attention away from what you [were] trying to say," and, consequently, "lower[ed] speaker credibility." This attitude is the idea advocated by several basic speech textbook writers (cf. McCroskey, 1968; Ross, 1970; and Wiseman and Barker, 1967).

Fourth, several of the respondents mentioned that when a teacher impresses upon them the importance of avoiding grammatical mistakes it "kind of makes you wonder when you spoke [sic] if you make the same

grammatical errors . . . [and] makes you feel self-conscious about it [your grammar] while you're giving a speech." Another said, "After they corrected you, you realized you were making mistakes and you'd start thinking about your mistakes and try not to make them, . . . you can only think about so many things and if you're thinking about grammar, then you're not going to be thinking about whatever you're talking about." Another expressed this idea: "I feel like I ought to use the correct grammar. When I don't and I realize it, then I feel self-conscious about it." These statements are consistent with the findings of Bailey (1973) and Wolfram and Fasold (1974) that constant monitoring of one's language can lead to self-consciousness.

Fifth, many of the students expressed the idea that good grammar would not necessarily increase someone's opinion of them, but that bad grammar would definitely detract from someone's opinion of them, especially in job interviews. No one felt that using good grammar would help them to get a better job, but many respondents felt that using poor grammar would decrease their chances of getting a job. Interestingly, this sentiment was expressed, in almost the same form, centuries ago by Cicero:

> Nobody ever admired an orator for correct grammar, they only laugh at him if his grammar is bad, and not only think him no orator but not even a human being; no one ever sang the praises of a speaker whose style succeeded in making his meaning intelligible to his audience, but only despised one deficient in capacity to do so. (De Oratore, 1948 translation, pp. 41-42)

Sixth, Bailey (1973) maintains that "English teachers are usually treated as the hierophants who have been admitted to the inner temple where 'correctness' dwells" (p. 386). Several respondents in the present study commented that their mothers had been English teachers and were always correcting their children's grammar, because "they [the mothers] know correct grammar." Perhaps Bailey's observation should be expanded to include secretaries since several of the respondents believed their mothers, who were secretaries, were also extremely knowledgeable about grammar. The fact that many respondents noted that their mothers and not their fathers corrected their grammar is consistent with Key's (1975) observation that females attempt to reach a higher status in language than do males.

Seventh, a number of the respondents believed that teachers were purposely looking for mistakes in their work. This was especially true, according to the respondents, in written work. The respondents agreed with Ross (1970) that a speech teacher would criticize them diligently, but many respondents believed that it was now too late to improve their use of grammar. They believed that grammar should be learned in junior high and high school and that by the time one gets to college it is too late to learn it if one has not already done so.

One respondent had a very interesting insight about his high school "grammar class" and the rules he was supposed to follow:

> It didn't even sound right, but that's the way they said it was. It didn't sound natural talking . . . or writing that, . . . probably because most people don't talk grammatically correct all the time and most people . . . talk with bad grammar . . . so the more you hear the kind of grammar people talk, that's going to sound more natural than so-called correct grammar.

One respondent expressed the dilemma she faced in choosing to use "correct" grammar vs. saying what her friends said: "You always seem more educated if your grammar isn't real sloppy, but right now . . . I don't want to seem really super-educated and sophisticated." Wolfram and Fasold (1974), describing attitudes such as these, observe that "inspite of eminently good reasons for not using overprecise speech, most Americans still have the vague feeling that ordinary speech is basically careless and that they should follow the rules" (p. 185).

Only one respondent was aware that grammar changes because language changes. She believed that this was true because she spent quite a bit of time with her grandparents who talked differently than she did. She attributed the difference to the fact that as people changed and society changed the means of communication had to be kept up-to-date.

IMPLICATIONS

From the responses given in this study college freshmen clearly do not have a view of language which coincides with the prevailing attitudes of linguists. College freshmen reflect the opinion of many Americans that there is one "correct" standard which must be followed in order to appear "intelligent" and "educated." They subscribe to the notions of traditional prescriptive grammar instead of the empirically based descriptive grammar. Students, therefore, need to be made aware of linguistic research and attitudes so that they do not perpetuate the prescriptive myth of "rightness" and continue to look down upon others who do not speak standard English or even others who do not choose to use the same variants of certain grammatical constructions.

Students should be introduced to the overriding linguistic principle that, in some cases, usage varies. Students need to learn about regional and social dialects and stylistic variations. Hopefully, students who are more aware of the principles of language will be confident in their own speech or, at least, able to identify variants which they use and which they consciously want to change.

This paper is not advocating the use of unacceptable grammar (such as hisself or I doesn't care), but calling for an end to the myth of "rightness," the feeling that spoken language is either right or wrong according to some unchanging, absolute code. In many instances, there are perfectly acceptable dialectical variations such as regional and social dialects.

As communication teachers, we cannot ignore language. It would be a disservice to our students to teach them that all language variations are acceptable. Clearly they are not, and the student will be judged, in many instances, by how well he or she handles standard English. But it is just as much a disservice to teach or stress grammatical rules which have no basis in actual usage or to make students believe that the language they hear and use at home is somehow inferior to the language they are expected to use in school.

The basic speech course should include a unit on the descriptive approach to language. The principles of descriptive linguistics taught in this unit might give comfort and insight to the student in this study who said:

> When I give a speech my head gets all jumbled up. Words come out that you don't want to say, but you just can't help it.

Table 1

Mode Rankings for Items in the Interview Schedule, Question 3

("Rank the following items in order of importance to you when you are delivering a public speech--delivery, organization, grammar, supporting material, visual aids, reasoning, choice of subject.")

Item	Ranking	Frequency
Delivery	1	11
Organization	3	15
Grammar	6	12
Supporting material	3	11
Visual aids	7	24
Reasoning	4	14
Choice of subject	1	20

Appendix A

Interview Schedule

(Receive respondents consent to tape record interview.)

I want to assure you that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions I'm going to ask you. I'm interested in your opinions and feelings. Please try to answer these questions as honestly as you can.

1. First of all, I'd like to get some general information from you.

   Are you a freshman, sophomore, junior or senior?
   What school are you in? (For example, Science, Management, etc.)
   How old are you?
   Where were you born?

2. I understand that you're enrolled in the basic communication course right now.

   Have you given a speech in class yet? How many speeches have you given? What type of speeches were they? When were they given?
   Have you ever given a speech outside of the basic communication class? Please describe the occasion and the type of speech.

3. I'd like you to rank these items (show respondent the items) in order of importance when you are making a speech. Mark the thing that is most important to you Number 1, the second most important Number 2, etc. In other words, which things do you pay the most attention to when you give a speech?

4. Now, I'd like to talk specifically about grammar.

   Is grammar something you feel that you are concerned with? How concerned are you with grammar? Why?

5. Would you or do you pay more attention to your use of grammar when you are giving a speech than at other times?

6. Can you remember a specific teacher, or maybe even several teachers, who impressed upon you the importance of using good grammar?

   What do you remember most about this teacher?
   Did this teacher make you feel at all self-conscious about speaking? Why or why not?

7. Can you remember an instance when you made a grammatical mistake and someone jumped on you because of it? Can you remember what you said? (If you can't remember an instance, can you remember hearing someone else make an error? What did the person say?)

   Describe the incident.
   How did you feel? (How do you think the other person felt? How would you have felt if you had been that person?)
   Why?

8. Do teachers criticize your grammar a lot?

   Why?
   Do speech teachers criticize your grammar as much as other teachers?
   Why?
   Do other people ever criticize your grammar? For example, your friends or your parents?
   Why?

9. Can you remember any books that specifically told you to avoid grammatical mistakes? What do you remember about them?

10. Do you think you pay as much attention to your grammar when you prepare to give a speech as you do when you prepare to write a paper?

    Why?

11. Generally, are you concerned about your use of grammar?

    Why?

Thank you for your time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, R. L. English Grammars and English Grammar. New York: Scribner's, 1972.

Aly, B. Nouns and verbs: The rhetoric of grammar. Speech Teacher, 1956, 5, 165-173.

Bailey, R. W. Write off versus write on: Dialects and the teaching of composition. In R. W. Bailey & J. L. Robinson (Eds.), Varieties of Present-Day English. New York: Macmillan, 1973.

Bloomfield, L. Language. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1933.

Cicero. De Oratore, Book III. English translation by H. Rackham. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948.

Fries, C. C. American English Grammar: The Grammatical Structure of Present-Day American English with Especial Reference to Social Differences or Class Dialects. New York: Appleton-Century Co., 1940.

Fries, C. C. Teaching of English: A Series of Essays on What is Good English? Teaching the English Language, Teaching Literature. Ann Arbor, Mich.: George Wahr Publishing Co., 1966.

Gleason, H. A., Jr. Linguistics and English Grammar. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965.

Hall, R. A., Jr. Linguistics and Your Language (2nd rev. ed. of Leave Your Language Alone!). Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1960.

Higginbotham, D. C. Implications of linguistic theory and research. In P. J. Newcombe & R. R. Allen (Eds.), New Horizons for Teacher Education in Speech Communication. Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Co., 1974.

Key, M. R. Male/Female Language. Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1975.

Langacker, R. W. Language and Its Structure: Some Fundamental Linguistic Concepts (2nd ed.). New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1973.

Malmstrom, J. Linguistic Atlas findings versus textbook pronouncement in current American usage. The English Journal, 1959, 48, 191-198.

McCroskey, J. C. An Introduction to Rhetorical Communication: The Theory and Practice of Public Speaking. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968.

Newcombe, P. J., & Allen, R. R. (Eds.). New Horizons for Teacher Education in Speech Communication: Report of the Memphis Conference of Teacher Educators. Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Co., 1974.

Porter, D. T., Freimuth, V. S., & Kibler, R. J. An empirical evaluation of the construct "communication apprehension." A paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Speech Communication Association. Chicago, 1974.

Pyles, T. The Origins and Development of the English Language (2nd ed.). New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1971.

Redd, C. A. The effect of frequency and severity of grammatical errors upon five criterion variables. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1970.

Rosenthal, M. The acquisition of child awareness of language: Age and socio-economic class correlates. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown University, 1973.

Ross, R. S. Speech Communication: Fundamentals and Practice (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970.

Scheidel, T. M. Speech Communication and Human Interaction. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1972.

Sencer, R. A. An investigation of the effects of incorrect grammar on attitude and comprehension in written English messages. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1965.

Shuy, R. W. Language and success: Who are the judges? In R. W. Bailey & J. L. Robinson (Eds.), Varieties of Present-Day English. New York: Macmillan, 1973.

Southworth, F. C., & Daswani, C. J. Foundations of Linguistics. New York: The Free Press, 1974.

Wiseman, G., & Barker, L. Speech-Interpersonal Communication. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1967.

Wolfram, W., & Fasold, R. W. The Study of Social Dialects in American English. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974.